

March 19, 2025

Chair Courtney Neron
Vice-Chair Emily McIntire
Vice-Chair April Dobson
Members of the House Education Committee



Subject: Neutral for HB 2007

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chair McIntire, Vice-Chair Dobson, and Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Wesley Heredia, I am the program manager at Vamonos Outside based in Bend. We are a youth development organization, which uses outdoor recreation and nature based learning to offer transformative experiences to latino/BIPOC youth and families. We provide afterschool programs for elementary and high school students and summer programming serving communities in Bend, Redmond, and Madras. I hold a BA in Environmental Studies, and I am entering my final year of a Masters program of Outdoor Experiential Education focusing on the mental health and social emotional benefits. My 10 year career in Outdoor Education has allowed me to meet and get to know hundreds of youth from all over the country, across all ages, and from diverse backgrounds. I care a great deal about empowering youth and fostering opportunities that will help them achieve their dreams and desires no matter who they are or where they come from.

Summer and after school learning programs are some of the most effective strategies to reach students in order to support their mental health, social emotional skills, and academic engagement. My occupation and organization utilizes the outdoors to help our latino/bipoc students to recalibrate themselves and build skills, so that they can be successful in and out of the classroom. These programs are vital for historically underserved students in Oregon schools because many families lack the resources for academic support outside of the classroom or face many barriers to extracurricular activities. In addition, afterschool and summer programs also can serve as a third space where students can have access to positive adult mentorship, be in safe & welcoming spaces, and where they can gather in a positive community environment. Our partners in schools such as teachers, principals, and counselors always have supported our work with their students and have seen the benefits those programs have on students while back in classes. It takes a Village to raise a child. We, as that village, understand we must be able to support the whole child in a strong and stable ecosystem consisting of families, schools, and community organizations.

Oregon has missed out on the full benefits of summer and afterschool learning due to haphazard funding, inconsistent implementation, and administrative barriers to community partnership. What we truly need is more summer and afterschool programs that are equitably and predictably funded which include funding to support community based organizations and tribal entities.

I urge you to prioritize predictable funding so we can empower schools, community-based organizations, Tribes, and other partners to collaboratively develop innovative programs that effectively address the needs of all youth, particularly those most impacted by educational inequities.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about this important issue.

Sincerely

Welsey Heredia

Program Manager - Vamonos Outside